



**November
2025**



Proposed Plan Change 120 Information Sheet #14

Special character areas

From 3 November to 19 December 2025, Auckland Council invites submissions on Proposed Plan Change 120: Housing Intensification and Resilience (PC120) - a change to the Auckland Unitary Plan (AUP) (our city's planning rulebook) that proposes to rezone areas of residential land for greater intensification, to enable greater building heights and densities in many parts of urban Auckland, and to strengthen management of natural hazard risks.

Submissions are now open until 5pm on Friday 19 December 2025.

This information sheet explains what special character areas are and how they will be managed through proposed changes to the AUP.

Background to Proposed Plan Change 120

PC78 was Auckland's former intensification plan change as required by the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD). It incorporated the Medium Density Residential Standards (MDRS) which was legally required at the time. This generally allowed three dwellings of up to three storeys to be built on most residential sites without resource consent.

In August 2025, the government amended the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA) which enabled PC78 to be withdrawn. Auckland Council withdrew PC78 (in part) and notified PC120 to improve Auckland's resilience to natural hazards and focus intensification around centres and transport nodes.

PC78 was withdrawn in part from 5pm on 9 October 2025, including withdrawal of the MDRS in PC78.

PC120 addresses central government requirements to:

- contribute to the same level of housing capacity in the AUP as was to be enabled by PC78

- enable building heights and densities within and around town and local centres which reflect the level of commercial and community activity these centres offer
- enable building heights of at least 6-storeys within walkable catchments from the edge of the city centre zone, the edge of metropolitan centre zones and around existing and planned rapid transit stops (train and busway stations) and
- enable building heights of at least 10- and 15- storeys around certain train stations listed in the RMA.

These heights and densities must be enabled unless a ‘qualifying matter’ applies to a site (see Information Sheet #13) which makes that level of development inappropriate.

PC120 also strengthens provisions that manage natural hazard risks. Areas potentially affected by flooding, land instability, coastal erosion or coastal inundation now and in the future are targeted with stronger rules and other planning measures. This approach is to improve Auckland’s resilience to severe weather events and natural hazards, following the storms in early 2023 which resulted in widespread flooding, landslips, and coastal inundation across the region.

Special character

The council has chosen to identify areas of residential and business special character value as a qualifying matter within walkable catchments and in areas within, and adjacent to, neighbourhood, town and local centre business zones to ensure these areas and their values are managed. Qualifying matters are those specific characteristics or values of a site or area which make the levels of intensification otherwise required, inappropriate.

Outside these areas, special character values are identified as a planning matter. These values will be managed where they meet the threshold for special character.

For more information on what qualifying matters are and how they are applied, refer to information sheet #13 Qualifying Matters.

What are special character areas?

Special character areas are identified as an overlay in the AUP, called the Special Character Areas Overlay – Residential and Business. These areas are older, established areas and places which may be whole settlements or parts of residential suburbs or a commercial area. They are areas and places of special architectural or other built character value, that have a collective importance, relevance and interest to a local area or to the region.¹

Special character areas physically link Aucklanders to the past development of the city. These areas illustrate the history of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland by showing how, when and why the city expanded during different eras and in response to different pressures and influences.

In illustrating the history of our city’s growth, special character areas also show past social values, influences, fashions and philosophies that have shaped Auckland over time. Because

¹ Auckland Unitary Plan, Regional Policy Statement B5.4

these areas illustrate the history of Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, they have relevance beyond their immediate locality and have importance to people beyond those who live there.

Special character areas are identified in the AUP planning maps and Schedule 15. All special character areas continue to apply after notification of Plan Change 120.

How and why was the quality of special character areas reviewed?

The NPS-UD and RMA require a site-specific analysis of the additional qualifying matters that the council has chosen to identify, including special character areas. This analysis is required to ensure that there is a robust justification for limiting heights or densities on properties within Auckland's urban environment.

Both the residential and business special character areas were reviewed in a process which involved data collection, review, and analysis². Field surveys were carried out in 2021 until the national COVID-19 alert levels no longer allowed this. Site-specific data was then collected through a desk-top based survey, and much of this data was checked during site visits in 2023 and 2024.

All special character areas were surveyed, which include over 21,000 special character residential properties and 1600 special character business properties. The results were analysed and mapped for each area. An area findings report was prepared for each area, which explains the special character values, the data collected, and an overall recommendation on the quality of the area.

Since completion of the area findings reports, amendments have been made to some special character areas in response to public feedback, submissions on PC78 (now partially withdrawn), re-survey, internal review, and changes to the boundaries of some walkable catchments. No amendments were made to the criteria or the guidance for survey.

The proposed extent of special character areas in Plan Change 120

The survey results, along with further work undertaken, informed the proposed extent of special character areas. These areas are identified in the PC120 map viewer – for guidance on how to use the viewer, refer to the PC120 Map Viewer 'How-to' Video.

Special character residential areas are required as a minimum to meet a threshold of containing 66% or more of individual properties that strongly contribute to the special character values of the area. In walkable catchments, special character residential areas need to meet a higher threshold.

Special character residential areas are identified as a qualifying matter where:

² The guidance for the survey of residential and business special character areas is available on the council's PC78 webpages.

- They are located inside walkable catchments and meet the threshold for high-quality special character. Areas that are high-quality have 75% or more of individual properties that strongly contribute to the special character values of the area.
- They are located within and adjacent to neighbourhood, local and town centre zones and meet the minimum threshold for special character.

In the Maungawhau (Mount Eden) and Kingsland walkable catchments additional special character residential areas are proposed to be removed from the Special Character Areas Overlay. The additional areas proposed to be removed are of high-quality special character value but are proposed to be removed as a strategic planning response to the directions of the RMA.

Special character residential areas are identified as a planning matter in all other areas where they meet the minimum threshold for special character.

This approach results in approximately three-quarters of properties within the operative residential Special Character Areas Overlay being retained in PC120.

Special character areas that are not proposed to be identified as a qualifying matter or planning matter through PC120 are not identified in the map viewer and are not proposed to be subject to the AUP Special Character Areas Overlay. These areas may have their zoning modified to enable greater development capacity. These changes do not come into effect until Plan Change 120 is operative.

For business special character areas, the areas proposed to be identified in PC120 are:

Balmoral Shopping Centre, Devonport, Eden Valley, Grey Lynn, Helensville, Howick, Kingsland, Lower Hinemoa Street, Mount Eden Village, Onehunga, Ōtāhuhu, Parnell, Ponsonby Road, Sandringham, West Lynn and Upper Symonds Street.

The extent of most of these business special character areas has been reduced. The proposed extents are shown in the PC120 map viewer.

Are there changes to the provisions for special character?

Some amendments are proposed to AUP Chapter D18 Special Character Areas Overlay. The proposed amendments do not change the AUP approach towards the management of special character but are required to ensure the overlay appropriately manages the values of special character areas.

Reading the property summary in the Plan Change 120 map viewer is where to find the information. The information is not shown on the maps.

One change proposed to Chapter D18 relates to the demolition, removal and relocation of buildings in residential special character areas. To ensure appropriate management of the values of retained special character areas, the demolition, removal and relocation rule, which had previously only applied to some residential properties in the overlay, is proposed to be amended.

Residential properties identified as defining or supporting the special character of an area are proposed to be subject to the demolition, removal and relocation rule, meaning a resource consent will be required for these activities.

Properties that are not identified as defining or supporting will not be subject to the demolition, removal and relocation rule.

Search for an address, or click directly on a property, in the PC120 map viewer for information whether a property in the special character overlay is:

- subject to the demolition, removal and relocation rule, residential overlay
- a character-supporting or character-defining building, business overlay.

A new building on any property in the special character area continues to require a resource consent application.

What about historic heritage?

Historic heritage is recognised as a matter of national importance under section 6 of the RMA and has been included in the NPS-UD and identified in PC120 as a qualifying matter. No changes to the existing AUP extent of the Historic Heritage Overlay or the provisions to manage it are proposed in PC120.

Further information

- For detailed information about the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 (NPS-UD) [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)
- For more information on the amendments to the RMA [visit the Ministry for the Environment website.](#)

Please note:

This information sheet is a summary document to assist with understanding Proposed Plan Change 120 – Housing Intensification and Resilience, which gives effect to Policies 3 and 4 of the National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 and addresses the requirements of Schedule 3C of the Resource Management Act 1991.

Proposed Plan Change 120 to the Auckland Unitary Plan was publicly notified by Auckland Council on 3 November 2025.

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